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Editorial: Court right to OK Gorge wind project

The Washington Supreme Court was right to approve a wind-energy project in Skamania County.

Seattle Times Editorial

THE Washington Supreme Court has ruled that the state properly permitted a wind-turbine project just outside the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.

But it *is* outside, and the ruling makes a strong case that the regulators followed state law. The final call was made a year ago by former Gov. Chris Gregoire, whose decision, the court said, “does not appear to be subject to any restrictions.”

In her approval last year, Gregoire noted that in 2006 the voters of Washington passed Initiative 937. This requires that, by 2020, utilities obtain 15 percent of their electricity from renewable sources, not counting dams. That means wind, and wind turbines have to be put where the wind is.

Gregoire did reduce the number from 50 to 35 to protect views of ridgelines from inside the scenic area.

The result will be towers up to 426 feet high spotted through a forest that will continue to be logged.

Skamania County government wants the project; the county has never recovered from the decline in the timber industry, and the unemployment rate there is 9 percent. The site was not zoned, which means the county will accept any land use not previously declared to be a nuisance.